

Guidelines for the Junior Officer (JO) Program

I. Background:

The Agency has hired 366 New Entry Professionals (NEPs) since the program began in 1999. In 2004 a redesigned International Development Intern (IDI) program began and to date 49 IDIs have been hired. The retention rate for these two programs has been approximately 90%.

The original plan was to run the NEP program for a five-year period to 'fill the gap' at the mid-level of the Foreign Service (FS). The NEPs now make up 36% of the overall FS and considering the number of Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) overseas (700) the NEPs make up a little less than 52% of the FSOs assigned overseas.

USAID reinstituted the IDI recruitment program in 2004 to attract entry-level junior officers into the FS. The current IDI requirements have produced officers with insufficient experience to perform well in an agency with a flat organizational structure as is the case in the majority of our overseas missions. And the missions are not well structured to provide the training needed.

To address these issues, the NEP and IDI programs will be phased out to allow for the development of a new FS hiring program that attracts people with more experience than the current IDI program but does not require the experience of the NEP program. Career Candidate diversity will remain a recruitment focus.

II. Description of the JO Program:

A number of elements from both the NEP and IDI programs will be incorporated into the JO program with a greater emphasis on the IDI program elements. The JO program will be used to recruit all entry-level career candidates into the FS. The program will seek the best qualified junior professional candidates who are willing to make a long-term commitment to the FS and international development. Agency policy is to recruit and select the best candidates available for FS appointments, without regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, color, age, religion, ethnic origin, disability, marital status, or political affiliation.

The JO program is designed to prepare Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) for tenure through an individually adapted training program. The total training program will be approximately three years with six to 18 months in Washington D.C. and approximately 24 months of broad-based training through rotational assignments at an overseas office. All JOs must meet USAID foreign language tenuring requirements before departing for assignment overseas.

Tenure criteria includes three years as a career candidate in the FS, at least 18 months of overseas service with USAID, foreign language proficiency at an Foreign Service Institute (FSI) tested level of S3/R3 (French, Spanish, Portuguese) or S2/R1 in all

other languages qualifying for USAID tenure, a top-secret security clearance, level one medical clearance and certification of availability for worldwide service. All FSOs must achieve tenure within five years of their entry on duty date.

JOs will be considered for graduation from the program at the end of their first overseas tour of duty (24 months overseas) or their three-year anniversary, whichever ever comes first.

III. General Qualifications and Requirements

The JO Program will require an advanced degree in the appropriate technical area. Relevant international professional experience is desirable. USAID plans to recruit in a wide range of professional areas, e.g., agriculture, economics, environment, administration, contracting, financial management, health, political science, etc.

JOs must be at least 18 years of age and not more than 59 years of age (see section 812 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended), a U.S. citizen at time of application, available for worldwide assignment and service, medically cleared for worldwide assignment and service, and registered with the Selective Service (for male applicants). In addition, all applicants selected for USAID positions are subject to drug testing.

IV. The Recruitment/Selection Process:

Based on assessments of present and projected personnel resources and organizational and programmatic needs, USAID plans to recruit two classes of approximately 30 JOs per year; one class approximately in January and one in September. Classes are contingent upon availability of funds for hiring and organizational priorities. These classes consist of various occupational categories such as Agriculturalists, Environmentalists, Contract Officers, Controllers, Health, Family Planning, etc.

Specific technical and administrative JO Program openings are advertised periodically. The qualified applicants are rated and ranked based on a paper review by a Technical Selection Panel (TSP). The TSP conducts an on-site candidate assessment of the highest ranking applicants. The on-site assessment consists of a written exercise, group discussion exercise and an individual interview conducted by the TSP. Candidates are then rated and ranked based on established criteria.

Candidates recommended for hiring will undergo additional reference checks and pre-employment processes, e.g., medical and security clearances.

In general, the Agency is seeking to hire Candidates as JOs at the FS-06 level with a salary range from \$35,265 to \$51,788 without locality pay and \$41,436 to \$60,851 with locality pay. Career Candidates may be hired at the FS-05 and 04 levels on an exceptional basis determined by occupational category to address critical skill needs that may arise at any given time. USAID follows Federal Salary setting guidelines.

Three factors are used to set salary: professional training, years of relevant experience and salary history.

V. Training and Promotion

Candidates entering the FS through the JO program are in training for approximately three-years. At the end of the three-year period, the JO will be reviewed by a graduation panel to determine whether the candidate is ready for graduation based on annual performance evaluations and the recommendations of Bureau, Office or Mission management.

JO training is guided by an Individual Development (training) Plan (IDP), which is a framework and tool to detail training needs. The knowledge, skills and abilities to be developed are in line with the Foreign Service skills matrix that applies to all FSOs at USAID. The skills matrix is the basis for annually determining whether an employee is performing at or above grade and is the basis for promotions. At the FS-06 level, a set of related competencies have been defined as the basis for establishing the IDPs. These competencies cover a range of behavioral, occupational and professional skills deemed critical to the successful functioning of entry-level FSOs.

During the training time in USAID/Washington, each JO will have a supervisor of record who is responsible for overseeing the development of the IDP, mentoring and evaluating annual performance. Each JO is also assigned a coach to help develop a training plan, learn about working in USAID, and help with the transition into the FS and the first assignment overseas. Coaches are retired FSOs that serve as a confidant and advisor supporting JOs as they navigate through the USAID culture.

The IDP is based on the JO's supervisor and coach's assessment of the JO's previous experience and training and its relationship to required skills and competencies. Training will be designed to provide the JO with the skills necessary for his or her first overseas assignment in the shortest possible time. To develop the necessary skills, each JO will attend formal and informal training sessions, carry out work in his/her home offices and perform on-the-job training in other Washington offices and temporary duty (TDY) overseas under rotational supervisors.

During the three-year training period, JOs will be considered for two promotions via an administrative process linked to the JO Program. Each JO will have an initial performance review after the first 11 months and second performance review 12 months after the initial review. Administrative promotions will be recommended after each satisfactory review.

Timing of the first two JO performance reviews is determined by the JO's Entry on Duty (EOD) date and is therefore not consistent with the April through March FS Annual Evaluation cycle. For example, an EOD date in March 2006 would result in an initial evaluation period of March 2006 through January 2007 (11 months). The

second evaluation will cover a period from February 2007 to January 2008 (12 months).

For both the initial and second annual performance review, the JO's supervisor will solicit 360 input from rotational supervisors and others, but must not include the JO's coach as part of the Annual Evaluation Form (AEF) process. Using 360 input, the JO's self assessment of performance, and his/her own independent assessment, the supervisor will prepare a written appraisal of the JO's performance against work objectives and performance measures for the rating period.

In order to be promoted administratively, JO's must demonstrate satisfactory performance, i.e., they must meet the standards of their class. Accomplishing work objectives and demonstrating requisite skills proficiency meets the class standards.

Administrative promotion decisions will be made by a review panel. The JO Review Panel will be established by M/HR/POD at appropriate intervals for each JO class, prior to the first anniversaries of EOD. The Panel will consist of four members. Chaired by the Chief of the Personnel Operations Division (M/HR/POD) or designee, the Panel will also include an Assignment and Performance Counselor (APC), the M/HR/POD Special Programs Team Leader and one senior FSO from outside of HR with expertise in the JO backstops under review.

The JO Review Panel will determine which JOs meet or fail to meet the standards of their class. Individuals who meet (or exceed) the standards of the class will be recommended for administrative promotion to the next FS grade/class.

Those who are determined by a JO Review Panel not to meet the class standards will not be recommended for promotion and will be issued a counseling letter from the JO Review Panel outlining corrective actions to improve their performance. This letter will not be included in the JO's performance file. However, JOs who have been determined by the Review Panel not to be meeting the standards of their class will have their evaluation files referred to the next regularly scheduled FS Performance Boards. Those who were not recommended for promotion by the Panel may be so recommended by the Boards. JOs who appear to the Performance Board to be failing to meet the standards of their class will be referred to the Tenure Board rather than the Performance Standards Board. The Tenure Board may recommend one of two actions for pre-tenure eligible career candidates:

1. Return the recommendation to the Performance Board noting non-concurrence with recommendation (the determination giving specifics regarding the Board's decision).
2. Terminate the JO from service.

Where an administrative promotion is recommended from FS-06 to FS-05, upon approval by the Director of Human Resources, the effective date will be the anniversary of the JO's EOD date. Second administrative promotions from FS-05 to

FS-04 will, upon approval, be effective on the second anniversary of the JO's EOD date.

VI. Initial Overseas Assignment

The Office of Human Resources will direct all initial assignments of JOs. JOs, Supervisors, Coaches, Bureaus and Missions will be consulted and to the extent possible their views will be taken into consideration. However, it should be noted that all FSOs are required to be worldwide available and assignments are ultimately the prerogative of Agency management.

Individual progress consistent with the time frame and content of the IDP will be the basis for determining when a JO is likely to be ready for his/her initial overseas assignment. Based on projected completion of IDP competencies, HR will begin the process of identifying an overseas assignment. This process requires a review of available positions during the annual position validation process (late summer each year). Several times during the year; the Agency will conduct this consultative assignment process to make JO assignments.

HR will attempt to place JOs in missions where: (First Preference) there will be a senior officer (Supervisor) in the JO's technical area and/or (Second Preference) in a position where the JO can overlap with the incumbent for up to 12 months, for training purposes. However, this is not always possible. The Agency will make every effort to arrange an appropriate initial assignment, which matches the needs and abilities of the JO with those of available positions.

Initial assignments of JOs will be facilitated through a number of existing placement authorities. The preference would be to have JOs placed in existing ongoing positions funded by missions and meeting the preferences above. In addition to these opportunities, JO placements will be facilitated using the Junior Officer Placement Authority (JOPA, Section 577 (g) of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act of 2006) and supported ceilings. The JOPA will be most effective if the JO's salary is paid from USAID/W Operating Expense (OE) funds. JOPA allows USAID to use program funds to pay overseas support costs for FSOs ranked FS-04 and below. These funds can be used to pay indirect costs such as housing and transportation-costs routinely paid from program funds for USPSCs. Supported ceilings would provide an additional \$150,000 in OE funds to missions accepting a JO assignment.